

Editorials

A Letter to the Executive Vice-President of the American Medical Association from Linda Hawes Clever

In response to the firing of Dr George Lundberg, Linda Hawes Clever communicates her thoughts and concerns to the AMA.

JANUARY 25, 1999

To: E. Ratcliffe Anderson, MD

Executive Vice-President and CEO
American Medical Association
515 N State Street
Chicago, IL 60610

Dear Dr. Anderson,

I am writing as a long-time member of the San Francisco Medical Society and the California Medical Association. I have been active in these organizations for years, chairing committees and task forces (most recently the Primary Care Task Force of the California Medical Association), attending board meetings (as guest and member), and recruiting new members. I also write as immediate past Editor of *The Western Journal of Medicine* and former Regent of the American College of Physicians.

My husband, also an internist, and I were out of the country when the first wave of news hit about your firing of George Lundberg, so perhaps we do not have the entire picture. I am also aware of the distortions that can take place in the press. Based on information available, however, I am compelled to ask the following questions:

- Why, really why, did you do this? I won't repeat others' hypotheses having to do with electoral politics and attitude. Perhaps it is the old-fashioned "hubris" that the Greeks described so well.
- How do you plan to maintain morale within the fine JAMA staff?
- How do you think you will ever recruit a distinguished successor, given the nature of Dr. Lundberg's departure?

- Do you have any idea of the ever-deepening well of disrespect that you are digging for the AMA? William Osler said, "Do the kind thing and do it first." Where does that philosophy fit in your management style? Public humiliation may be effective in some organizations, but not in medicine, a profession that depends on excellence, compassion, and good communications. Of course, you cannot humiliate Dr. Lundberg. His record and integrity stand strong and shining. You have humiliated the AMA. We expect leaders to act like doctors, not dictators.

Our country is going through dark hours. You have further darkened our profession's hours. I know you do not stand alone. The Board that was responsible for the Sunbeam situation is virtually the same Board as now. That Board is accountable for your actions. There will need to be new Board members, new administration, and abundant new vision. There will need to be a return to intellectual and publishing freedom before the public and profession can even start to regain its confidence in your organization. I am dismayed. Worse, really.

Sincerely,

LINDA HAWES CLEVER, MD, MACP
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California Pacific Medical Center